

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO

# MASTERING THE ART OF PRODUCTIVITY IN YOUR SMALL BUSINESS



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## CHAPTER 1

# Productivity 101: What Is It?

# What Is Productivity?



When it comes to running a small business, productivity is the act of executing and moving forward with your business goals. That might mean:

- Prospecting or booking a new client
- Working on a project or service (billable hours)
- Refining your business plan (and taking steps to act on your vision)
- Managing your financials

Keep in mind: To be truly productive means you must be efficient. Making the most of your time and resources means working smarter, not harder. It's an advanced skill, but one most successful small business owners ultimately master.

# Understand the Differences: Are You Busy or Productive?



Every small business owner wants to boast that they're busy. A busy business is thriving, right? Not always. Unfortunately, "busy" is often a euphemism for "poorly managed." If you're busy from day to night but your business isn't moving forward steadily, you've strayed from the path of true productivity.



*Pro-Tip: To determine if you're productive or busy, keep track of everything you do on a hectic day. Then ask yourself: Does it directly or indirectly contribute to your short- and long-term goals? If you answered "yes" but still feel overwhelmed, it might be time to delegate or hire help. We'll explain in chapters 3 and 4!*

# Discover What Gets in the Way of Your Productivity

TASK	Y / N	SOLUTION
Social media		
Personal appointments, errands		
Reading and responding to emails		
Fear of failure or success		
Noise or other environmental distractions		
Feeling overwhelmed with work volume		
Internet / Netflix		
Never-ending administrative tasks		
Messy or disorganized workspace		
Other (Insert your own)		

“

Life and business inevitably throw us curve balls, so be prepared to broaden your horizons sooner than you might expect.



– **CHUCK LEAVELL,**  
Mother Nature Network, co-founder

Learn More: [My Past Life as a Small Business Owner:  
What I'd Do Differently](#)

# Remember: At Times, Productivity Can Be Elusive

## LET'S BE CLEAR...

It's impossible to be productive 100% of the time. Most entrepreneurs experience days or even weeks when it's especially difficult to muster the intensity to keep a business moving forward. After all, we're only human!



## MANAGE AND MEASURE YOUR PRODUCTIVITY BY FOLLOWING THE 80/20 RULE

Since we can't be productive beings at all times, consider spending 80% intentionally investing attention to productive tasks, and spending 20% on other things.

If you're struggling to be productive, take a little time off to recharge your battery. It's not always easy to create that space but even an afternoon at an art gallery or movie theatre can make a world of difference. Also, try to take at least a few weeks off every year. You'll come back better than ever!



## HOW CAN I BE MORE PRODUCTIVE?

We're glad you asked! There are lots of ways to make efficient use of your time as an entrepreneur—from the simple to the profoundly creative. We're thrilled to present some of the very best right here. Dig in!

## CHAPTER 2

# How to Create a Productive Work Environment



# 10 Steps to Being Productive in a Home Office

Productivity doesn't happen by accident. You've got to set the stage.

## STEP 1: CLAIM A SPACE TO WORK

Whether it's a spacious study or a corner of the kitchen table, designate an area where you will work. Your brain will be trained to get into work mode whenever you enter that space.

## STEP 2: GET DRESSED FOR YOUR WORKDAY

Even though you work from home, you'll feel more professional if you're dressed as if you're headed to the office. Your outward appearance will contribute to your feelings of confidence and productivity.

### STEP 3: HAVE THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT

Identify what you need to run your business. A laptop and basic office supplies are a good start. Be efficient with your income and add as you go rather than investing in things you don't need at the outset.

### STEP 4: BE METICULOUS ABOUT FILING ELECTRONIC PAPER FILES

Label folders with precise names and separate ongoing work from archives of completed work. File as you go instead of letting things pile up

### STEP 5: SAVE PERSONAL ERRANDS FOR THE WEEKEND

Flexibility is one of the perks of working from home. It's also one of productivity's biggest enemies. Nothing makes a workday whoosh by faster than "running a few errands."





## **STEP 6: OBSERVE REGULAR OFFICE HOURS...**

Choose hours of work that fit with your natural rhythm of productivity, but be aware that your clients need to be able to reach you when they're working.

## **STEP 7: ...BUT BE FLEXIBLE**

The benefit of working for yourself is not punching a clock. Sometimes long days make sense; other times short ones do. As long as the work is getting done, do what comes naturally.

## STEP 8: TAKE BREAKS

Taking productive breaks are important for your body and your creativity. Set timers to refresh yourself by stretching, taking a quick walk, exercising or meditating. Avoid breaks like web surfing, laundry, cooking and other household chores. They tend to take on a life of their own.

## STEP 9: SWITCH IT UP ONCE IN AWHILE

Give yourself a change of scenery by working one morning a week in a coffee shop, library or client office. Working between different walls can be refreshing.

## STEP 10: SCHEDULE REGULAR FACE-TO-FACE TIME WITH OTHER HUMANS

If you work primarily by yourself, schedule networking coffees or lunches with current/potential clients and other solopreneurs in your industry. Interacting face-to-face with others may inspire new approaches in your own work.





# 6 Ways to Cultivate a Productive Office Culture with Employees

## STEP 1: DESIGN YOUR WORKPLACE AROUND EMPLOYEE PREFERENCES

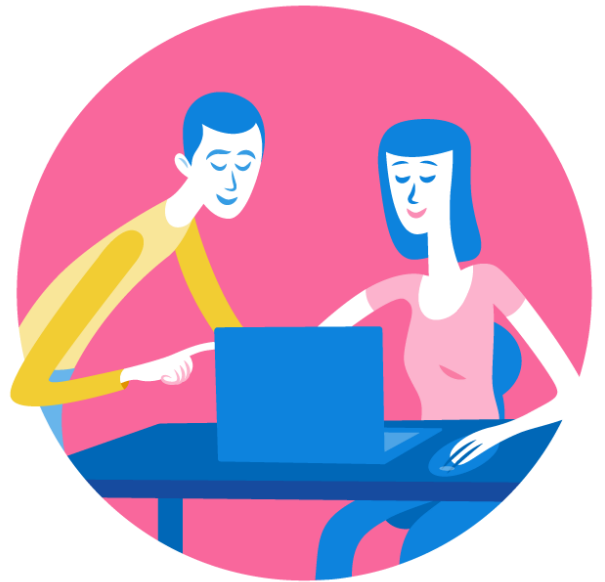
An open space, cubicle or office with a door? Lots of art on the walls or a clean, white canvas? Everybody has an ideal environment for productivity. Encourage your employees to create theirs as much as the space allows.

## STEP 2: VALUE PRODUCTIVITY OVER HOURS IN THE OFFICE

A satisfied employee is usually a productive employee. Be clear about what is expected of your employees and then give them the semi-freedom to manage their own time. If they can effectively serve your clients by working from home on Fridays or leaving early on Tuesdays and putting a few extra hours in another time, why not?

## STEP 3: NURTURE AND COMMUNICATE WITH EMPLOYEES

Do your employees have a clear set of goals and understand what they're working towards? They can be more productive when they know how their performance affects other parts of the business. As a leader, it's key to be the driver of communication and mentorship throughout your business. Ultimately, this will help you and your entire team have a clear, mutual vision.



## STEP 4: ENCOURAGE REGULAR BREAKS

It can get hectic in the office, so encourage your employees to take regular breaks to recharge. They'll feel recharged and be more productive when they have time to connect with others and step away from their desks.



## STEP 5: MAKE TEAM-BUILDING PART OF EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES

Productive people feel connected to their colleagues and business goals. Don't wait for professional development opportunities or your annual holiday lunch to bring people together. Some creative ways to unite the team regularly include: lunchtime walks, potluck snacks and weekly huddles—an opportunity for everybody to share the projects they're working on and why.



## STEP 6: DON'T EMAIL AFTER HOURS

If you have a habit of catching up on emails at night or on weekends, stop! Give your team the opportunity to recharge during their time off, so they can be productive when it's actually time to work.



*Pro-Tip: The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Happen in Organizations* helps you gauge whether your employees know how their performance affects other parts of the business. Can everyone in your company answer these 4 questions?

- How do we make money (profit)?
- Who are our toughest competitors?
- What do customers see as our differential advantages in the marketplace?
- What new products or services will we initiate in the next 6 months?

## CHAPTER 3

# Productive Ways to Divide and Conquer Your Work

“

I thought as the owner and president that I had to have all the answers... Over 20 years... I learned that it was impossible for me to do it and know it all.



– **ANISA TELWAR,**  
Anisa International, founder and CEO

Learn More: [Delegation May Not Come Easy, But it's Key to Success](#)

# 9 Strategies for Doing the Work

Successful entrepreneurs don't wing it. They prioritize, strategize and are intentional about how they move their business forward. Here are some big-picture strategies to help you optimize your business practices.



## #1: FOCUS ON HIGH-VALUE ACTIVITIES (HVA)

It's easy to get bogged down in low-value activities like checking emails as they come in or doing administrative tasks that could be delegated. Ideally, you'll spend 80% (or more) of your time on activities that directly or indirectly lead to generating revenue. Identify the HVAs that lead to business success and prioritize them over everything else.

## #2: ORGANIZE YOUR TIME USING THE ABCDE METHOD OF TASK PRIORITIZATION

Overwhelmed with your volume of work? Make a list of your to-dos and slot them into A, B, C, D or E list. It'll quickly become clear where to begin.

METHOD	SUMMARY
A	Tasks that must be done within the next day or so to avoid consequence
B	Tasks that should be done but aren't as time sensitive
C	Tasks that would be nice to finish, but aren't urgent
D	Tasks that can be delegated
E	Tasks that can be eliminated

### #3: KNOW WHEN TO SAY NO

Here's an HVA: Review your current client roster and identify which clients or projects take the least amount of effort and pay the most. These are the clients you want to work with. Whether you're working with a new or existing client, don't be afraid to say no to jobs that:



Will pay way less than your proposed rate



Are not a good fit with your skills and brand



Are managed by a potential scope-creeping client



Are consistently frustrating because the client is unpleasant

#### #4: DELEGATE WORK

If you have a small team, keep the HVAs to yourself and delegate the tasks that take up your time, but not your CEO brainpower. Even solopreneurs can look at ways to outsource time-consuming jobs. Hire a student to manage your files, an accountant to look after your finances and a developer to take care of your website. These expenses will pay for themselves if you devote your time to netting and serving high-quality clients.

#### #5: BLOCK OFF TIME FOR RECURRING TASKS

Want to stay on top of important HVA tasks? Build them into your schedule. For instance, Mondays between 1–3pm you're prospecting. Tuesday mornings you'll take care of your financials first thing. Wednesdays you'll leave completely open for meetings. Devoting time to the same task will help you stay on track and be prepared to be most productive with that time.



#### #6: BE CLEAR ABOUT HOW YOU WANT TO COMMUNICATE

If you're one of the millions of modern professionals who have come to abhor checking voicemail, why not remove that task from your life altogether? Make it clear (on your website, in your email signature and in person with your clients) that the best way to reach you is by email, text, IM or whatever communication method you prefer. (It goes without saying that you'll swiftly respond using the method you've chosen!)

## #7: USE THE TECHNOLOGY AT YOUR FINGERTIPS



Take care of time-consuming tasks like expenses and time tracking in just a few clicks.



Create customized keyboard shortcuts for your most used text and pictures.



Organize email subscriptions into a single digest and unsubscribe easily.



Make use of filters and tools to pare down your inbox and make it more manageable.



Use this tool to understand how much time you spend on all applications and websites.



This tool works with your calendar to allow clients and staff to book time with you.



## #8: WORK WITH YOUR NATURAL TENDENCIES

Everyone has an Achilles heel (or two). Acknowledge them and find strategies to work with them, not against them. For example, if you're usually too spent by Friday to complete work that requires creativity or deep reflection, front load your week with those kinds of activities and reserve Fridays for meetings or prospecting. Are mornings murder for you? Schedule activities that will wake you up, e.g. breakfast meetings or earlier phone calls, instead of shuffling to your desk and expecting yourself to dig into a big project immediately.



## #9: SET A CLEAR AGENDA FOR EVERY MEETING

From the clients who schedule daily or weekly check-ins to the long and monotonous conference calls that have you wondering why you're even on the line, set boundaries for client meetings. Your time is valuable. Be sure you have a clear agenda for every meeting you attend, even if it's a quick chat with a team member.



# Don't Miss Out on the Good Stuff

For all your productivity tips, inspiration and more,  
subscribe to the weekly FreshBooks blog newsletter.

Subscribe



## CHAPTER 4

# How to Be Productive in the Daily Details

When it comes to sustainable productivity, your daily habits are everything. Simple, small but infinitely effective, there are the tips that can make a huge difference in your efficiency.

# Day-to-Day Productivity Tips

## 1. DO THE BIGGEST TASK FIRST

Avoid leaving the most draining or onerous tasks until the end of the day. It'll weigh on you and keep you from being truly productive.

“ Mark Twain once said that if the first thing you do each morning is to eat a live frog, you can go through the day with the satisfaction of knowing that that is probably the worst thing that is going to happen to you all day long. Your ‘frog’ is your biggest, most important task, the one you are most likely to procrastinate on if you don’t do something about it.



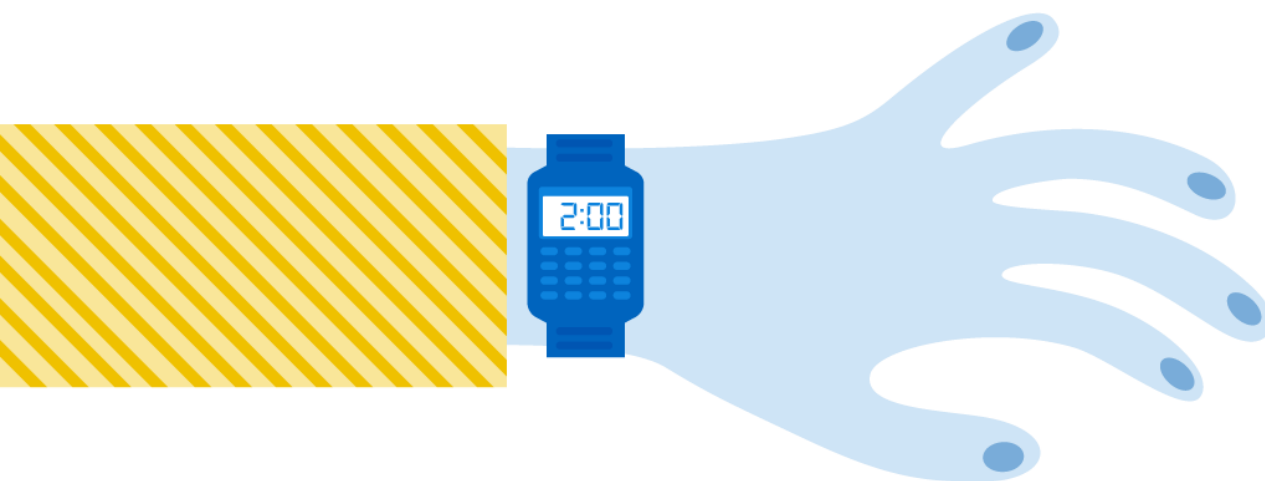
– BRIAN TRACY,  
speaker and author of  
The Psychology of Achievement

## 2. TAKE IT ONE TASK AT A TIME

With the constant barrage of email and social media, it's almost impossible to stay focused on one task at a time. But it's critical that we do. Research indicates that humans are terrible multitaskers. A [University of London study](#) found that multitaskers actually experience declines in their IQ scores! To be truly productive, give all your attention to one task at a time. That way, you'll work smarter and faster.

## 3. OBSERVE THE TWO-MINUTE RULE

The small things can feel onerous when they pile up. Reduce it by following the two-minute rule: "If it takes less than two minutes to do, just do it." Allocated a little bit of time to take care of it each week, and just do it. Prime tasks include filing a payment receipt, sending a quick email follow-up, creating a (paper or digital) folder for a new client and putting away office supplies as you use them.



#### 4. STOP “WORKING” AN HOUR BEFORE YOU STOP WORKING

Devote the last hour of every workday to prepare for success the following day. Answer those final emails, save and close documents, tweak your to-do list for tomorrow and make your desk a blank slate so you can jump into action the second you enter your workspace in the morning.



#### 5. DON'T “WORK-CRASTINATE”

Work-crastinate: The act of working on non-urgent work to avoid tackling an unpleasant or intimidating task. E.g. “I got my inbox down to 5 emails today and wrote a sell sheet of my services... but I’m in serious danger of missing a big deadline later this week.” It can be exhilarating to accomplish the unexpected, but it’s not worth the cost of the bigger picture. Back to point #1: Do the biggest task first.

## 6. DON'T FORGET TO BREATHE

When you're panicking about the volume of your workload, remember to take a breath and follow author Anne Lamott's father's practical—and calming—advice:

“Thirty years ago my older brother, who was ten years old at the time, was trying to get a report written on birds that he'd had three months to write, which was due the next day... he was at the kitchen table close to tears, surrounded by binder paper and pencils and unopened books about birds, immobilized by the hugeness of the task ahead. Then my father sat down beside him put his arm around my brother's shoulder, and said, “Bird by bird, buddy. Just take it bird by bird.”



– ANNE LAMOTT,  
**Bird by Bird, Some Instructions on Writing and Life**



## 7. READ EMAIL 2–3 TIMES A DAY

Avoid email “triage” (reading and responding to emails as they come in) by setting aside time to read and respond to your email two or three times a day. If you’re concerned you’ll miss something urgent, remind yourself that people generally pick up the phone during true emergencies.



Pro-Tip: Tim Ferriss, author of *The 4-Hour Work Week* provides an email template to help manage expectations: “Due to high workload, I am currently checking and responding to email twice daily at 12 p.m. ET and 4 o.m. ET. If you require urgent assistance that cannot wait until either 12 p.m. or 4 p.m., please contact me via phone at 555-555-5555.”

## 8. TAKE ACTION ONCE

The most successful entrepreneurs make swift, considered decisions. Most of our daily decisions can be made quickly, particularly if we're focused and intentional about what we're trying to achieve with our business. Instead of letting emails and paperwork pile up, decide right away if you'll attend that conference, take on that client or purchase that equipment. Don't delay a decision you can make today.



Productive people never put anything in a holding pattern, because touching things twice is a huge time-waster. Don't save an email or a phone call to deal with later. As soon as something gets your attention you should act on it, delegate it or delete it.



– **DR. TRAVIS BRADBERRY,**  
co-author of *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*

## 9. AVOID GOOGLE

It's perfectly natural to be distracted by random thoughts or questions that pop into your head while you're working on a task that's unrelated. Resist the urge to turn to the Internet right away. Instead, write it down and look it up later.



## CHAPTER 5

# Take Productivity to the Next Level with FreshBooks



# The Benefits of Using FreshBooks

If you're looking for a way to be ultra-efficient with your time, FreshBooks, the #1 accounting software in the cloud for self-employed professionals and their teams, will get you there. Here's how FreshBooks helps you put your productivity strategies and habits into action!



## USE TECHNOLOGY: AUTOMATE YOUR INVOICES

Create a recurring invoice template, set a schedule and FreshBooks will automatically generate and send invoices to your clients.



## TWO-MINUTE RULE: TRACK YOUR EXPENSES

Add them manually from your desktop, snap a photo of your receipt from your mobile device, connect your bank account or credit card to automatically import expenses.



### **GET PAID FASTER: ACCEPT ONLINE PAYMENTS**

With FreshBooks Payments, your clients can pay you online by credit card—straight from their invoice. Easy for them, fast for you.



### **GO MOBILE: TAKE YOUR BUSINESS ON THE ROAD**

With FreshBooks' mobile apps, access your business information wherever you are. Take care of an expense or invoice immediately, so nothing piles up at the office.



### **DELEGATE: MAKE COLLABORATION SEAMLESS**

Projects allows you to share files and update your team within FreshBooks to keep conversations in a central place—no more lengthy email threads.



### **FOCUS ON HIGH-VALUE ACTIVITIES: TRACK YOUR TIME**

FreshBooks' Time Tracking helps you keep an accurate log of you and your team's hours. Plus, you can automatically create an invoice directly from your logged time.



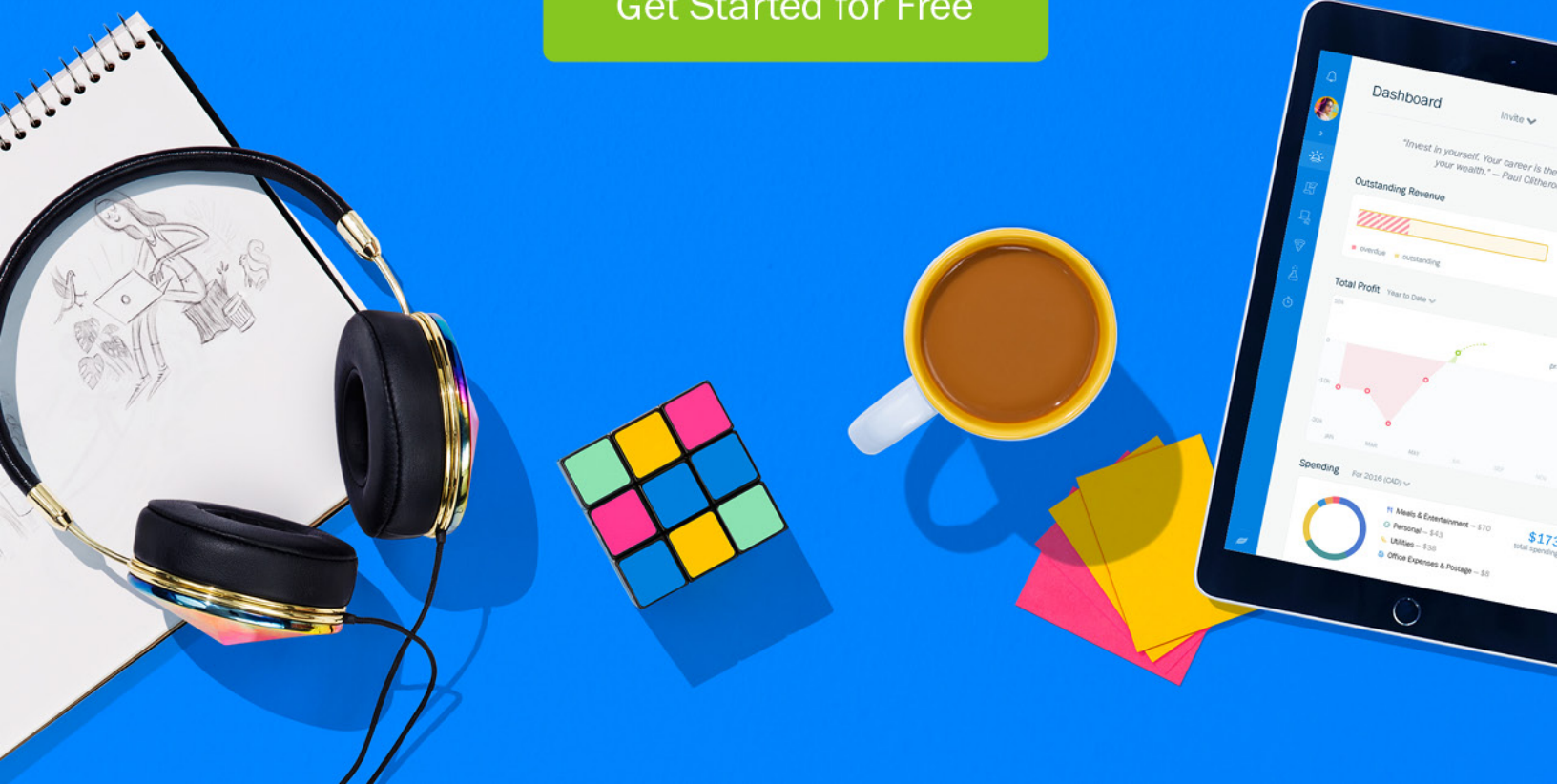
# Have a Never-Ending To-Do List?

Let FreshBooks help cross off some tasks.

Join 10 million other self-employed professionals and small business owners who use FreshBooks to track their time, collaborate with their teams and take care of their pesky paperwork.

At last, find productivity in doing the work that sits atop of your list—the work you truly love to do.

Get Started for Free





# Resources

For more insights on productivity, check out these helpful links from the FreshBooks blog.

For New Business Owners

[7 Productivity Hacks for Work From Home Newbies](#)

[Sometimes, Turning Down Work is the Right Choice](#)

[Work / Life Balance: 9 Work Habits to Get You Home on Time](#)

For You and Your Team

[How Small Business Can Motivate Employees to Boost Productivity](#)

[5 Ways to Make Your Employees Happier and More Productive](#)

[8 Ways to Empower Your Employees To Be More Productive](#)

For Inspiration and Motivation

[28 Pieces of Productivity Advice I Stole From People Smarter Than Me](#)

[5 High-Value Activities That Will Improve Your Life Today](#)

[Boost Productivity: Small Things You Can Do Every Day to Become Successful](#)



## Useful Tools and Tips

[Give Your Productivity a Lift in 2017: Time-Saving Features on FreshBooks](#)

[Get More Done: The Time-Saving & Productivity Apps We Love](#)

[Increase Productivity: Ways to Apply the 80/20 \(aka the Pareto Principle\)](#)

